

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 KUALA 01966 01 OF 02 071005Z

10

ACTION EA-09

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R 050930Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3016

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KUALA LUMPUR 1966

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MY

SUBJECT: SABAH ELECTIONS BEGIN APRIL 4, END APRIL 14

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 1537 (DTG 180825Z MAR 76)

1. SUMMARY. PEOPLE OF MALAYSIA'S BORNEAN STATE OF SABAH WILL VOTE FOR 48 STATE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY SEATS IN STAGGERED POLLING BEGINNING APRIL 4 AND ENDING APRIL 14. AT STAKE IS THE CONTINUED DOMINANCE OF TUN MUSTAPHA'S UNITED SABAH NATIONAL ORGANIZATION (USNO) AND ITS ELECTION PARTNER THE SABAH CHINESE ASSOCIATION (SCA) WHICH, WITH THE SABAH INDIAN CONGRESS (SIC), MAKE UP THE SABAH ALLIANCE (SA) COALITION. ALSO AT ISSUE IS THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THE OPPOSITION BERJAYA PARTY HEADED BY LONG-TIME MUSTAPHA RIVAL TIN MOHAMED FUAD (DONALD STEPHENS). THIS WILL BE FIRST LOCAL ASSEMBLY ELECTION SINCE 1967 AND THE FEDERAL
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PAGE 02 KUALA 01966 01 OF 02 071005Z

GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN ELABORATE STEPS TO ENSURE THAT IT

WILL BE FAIR AND HONEST. WHILE ORIGINALLY HELPING TO CREATE BERJAYA LAST SUMMER AS A MEANS OF BREAKING MUSTAPHA'S COMPLETE DOMINATION OF THE STATE, KUALA LUMPUR NOW APPEARS TO BE TAKING A HANDS-OFF ATTITUDE EXCEPT THAT THE PRIME MINISTER REPORTEDLY HAS TOLD MUSTAPHA THAT HE MAY NOT RETURN AS CHIEF MINISTER. MUSTAPHA AND HIS/PROTEGES IN THE STATE GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, HAVE MOBILIZED THEIR FOLLOWERS TO CAMPAIGN HARD AND HAVE THROWN IN VASTLY GREATER SUMS THAN ARE AVAILABLE TO BERJAYA THEREFORE THE SABAH ALLIANCE SEEMS SURE TO WIN ENOUGH SEATS TO FORM AND CONTROL THE NEXT STATE GOVERNMENT. VIEWS OF THE OPPOSITION PARTY'S STRENGTH DIFFER, BUT BERJAYA DOES NOT SEEM LIKELY TO WIN MORE THAN 12 TO 14 SEATS AND THE MALAYA-BASED PEKEMAS PARTY MIGHT PICK UP ON OR TWO OTHERS. BERJAYA'S SUCCESS OR FAILURE ASIDE, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS SUCCESSFULLY REIMPOSED ITS CONTROL OVER THE SECURITY APPARATUS IN THE STATE WHICH SHOULD ENSURE THAT ONE-MAN RULE BY MUSTAPHA IS NOT REIMPOSED. END SUMMARY.

2. STAGGERED ELECTIONS IN THE BORNEAN STATE OF SABAH BEGAN APRIL 4 AND WILL CONTINUE TO COUNTING DAY ON APRIL 10. A TOTAL OF 126 CANDIDATES ARE RUNNING FOR 48 STATE ASSEMBLY SEATS IN THE FIRST CONTESTED ELECTION FOR THE ASSEMBLY SINCE 1967. THE SABAH ALLIANCE HEADED BY FORMER CHIEF MINISTER TUN MUSTAPHA IS CONTESTING ALL 48 SEATS AS IS THE OPPOSITION BERJAYA PARTY HEADED BY TUN MOHAMED FUAD (DONALD STEPHENS). THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, THROUGH THE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE AND THE POLICE, HAS TAKEN VERY ELABORATE STEPS TO ENSURE THAT THE CAMPAIGN AND THE ELECTION ARE PEACEFUL, FAIR AND HONEST. POLICE FORCES HAVE BEEN AUGMENTED BY A REPORTED TWO THOUSAND MEN FROM OUT OF STATE. BALLOTING, WHICH MUST BE STAGGERED BECAUSE OF COMMUNICATIONS PROBLEMS IN THE STATE'S INTERIOR, WILL BE SUPERVISED BY OFFICIALS FROM ALL PARTIES AND EACH BALLOT BOX WILL BE GUARDED DAY AND NIGHT BY AT LEAST ONE POLICEMAN FROM PENINSULAR MALAYSIA. BOXES WILL ALL BE TAKEN TO ONE OF 16 STATIONS WHERE ELECTION COMMISSION OFFICIALS WILL SUPERVISE THE COUNTING ON THE LAST DAY OF THE ELECTION. POLICE
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 KUALA 01966 01 OF 02 071005Z

COMMISSIONER YUSOF KHAN AND ELECTIONS COMMISSION CHAIRMAN TAN SRI AHMAD PERANG WILL PERSONALLY GUIDE THE PROGRESS OF THE VOTING.

3. WITH THE DEFECTION FROM BERJAYA OF FEDERAL MINISTER OF TRANSPORT AND WORKS GHANI GILONG AND THE DETENTION BY THE FEDERAL AUTHORITIES OF BERJAYA SECRETARY GENERAL MOH. NOOR MANSOR IT WOULD SEEM THAT THE KUALA LUMPUR

GOVERNMENT HAS WITHDRAWN ITS FAVOR FROM THE OPPOSITION PARTY WHICH IT HELPED TO CREATE LAST SUMMER. THE OUTLINES OF THE GOM-BERJAYA RELATIONSHIP NEVER HAVE BEEN CLEAR BUT IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE FAILURE OF THE PARTY TO ATTRACT THE EXPECTED NUMBER OF ADHERENTS FROM THE RULING SABAH ALLIANCE (UNITED SABAH NATIONAL ORGANIZATION, USNO; SABAH CHINESE ASSOCIATION, SCA; AND SABAH INDIAN CONGRESS, SIC) FOLLOWED BY STRONG PERSONAL COUNTER-ATTACKS BY MUSTAPHA AND HIS FOLLOWERS DIMINISHED KUALA LUMPUR'S ENTHUSIASM FOR THE NEW PARTY. FURTHERMORE, BY REMOVING THE POWER OF ARREST FROM MUSTAPHA AND FORCING HIM TO RESIGN AS CHIEF MINISTER LAST OCTOBER THE GOM HAS GONE A LONG WAY TOWARD REESTABLISHING CONTROL OVER THE STATE. IT NOW CONTROLS THE POLICE AND SECURITY FORCES COMPLETELY AND HAS INTRODUCED FEDERAL OFFICIALS WHO ARE NOT BEHOLDEN TO MUSTAPHA IN OTHER KEY POSITIONS. PERHAPS BECAUSE OF BERJAYA'S COMPARATIVE LACK OF SUCCESS IN SECURING FOLLOWERS, OR PERHAPS BECAUSE OF RELUCTANCE WITHIN UMNO TO ASSIST IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A STATE GOVERNMENT DOMINATED BY CHRISTIANS, DIRECT FEDERAL SUPPORT SEEMS TO HAVE LAPSED. A RELIABLE PRESS SOURCE HAS REPORTED THAT IN KUALA LUMPUR MEETING BETWEEN TUN MUSTAPHA AND THE NEW PRIME MINISTER, DATUK HUSSEIN ONN WHICH TOOK PLACE ABOUT MARCH 13 OR 14, THE PM TOLD MUSTAPHA THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT SIDE WITH EITHER PARTY BUT WOULD ENSURE THAT THE ELECTIONS WOULD BE COMPLETELY HONEST. HE REPORTEDLY WARNED MUSTAPHA, HOWEVER, THAT HE WOULD NOT ACCEPT A RETURN BY THE TUN AS CHIEF MINISTER, ALTHOUGH HE WOULD NOT INTERFERE WITH MUSTAPHA'S RUNNING FOR THE ASSEMBLY. WHETHER OR NOT THIS REPORT IS CORRECT, MUSTAPHA'S SUCCESSOR AS CHIEF MINISTER, TAN SRI HAJI SAID KERUAK, ANNOUNCED LAST WEEK THAT HE WOULD CONTINUE IN HIS POST AFTER THE ELECTION.

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PAGE 04 KUALA 01966 01 OF 02 071005Z

(WHILE GENERALLY CONSIDERED SUBSERVIENT TO MUSTAPHA, SAID KERUAK IS MUCH MORE ACCEPTABLE TO THE OPPOSITION THAN MUSTAPHA.)

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PAGE 01 KUALA 01966 02 OF 02 071005Z

12

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KUALA LUMPUR 1966

4. IN 1967, THE KADAZAN-BASED UNITED PEOPLES KADAZAN ORGANIZATION (UPKO) LED BY TUN FUAD WON 64,000 VOTES AND 12 SEATS IN CONTRAST TO 14 SEATS AND 70,000 VOTES FOR THE ALLIANCE. MUCH HAS HAPPENED SINCE THEN, HOWEVER, AND THE REDISTRICTING THAT PRECEDED THE 1974 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS REDUCED CHINESE DOMINANCE IN SEVERAL DISTRICTS WHERE THE CHINESE HAD SIDED WITH UPKO. FURTHERMORE, BY DISSOLVING THE ASSEMBLY JANUARY 23, 1976, MUSTAPHA'S ADHERENTS PREVENTED THE LISTING OF 40,000 NEW VOTERS WHOSE REGISTRATIONS HAD NOT BEEN CERTIFIED BY THE ELECTIONS COMMISSION. BERJAYA SUPPORTERS BELIEVE THAT THESE VOTES WOULD HAVE MAINLY GONE TO THEM.

5. BERJAYA IS EXPECTED TO GET ITS MAIN SUPPORT FROM THE KADAZANS WHO CONSTITUTE ABOUT 28 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION AND THE CHINESE WHO MAKE UP 21 PERCENT. HOWEVER, THE NEWLY REORGANIZED SCA AND THE PEKEMAS (SOCIAL JUSTICE) PARTIES ALSO WILL APPEAL TO CHINESE IN KEY URBAN DISTRICTS. FORTY USNO AND EIGHT SCA CANDIDATES (THERE CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 KUALA 01966 02 OF 02 071005Z

ARE NO SIC CANDIDATES) FACE 48 BERJAYA, 11 PEKEMAS, 3 BERSATU AND 14 INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES. THERE WILL BE 23 STRAIGHT ALLIANCE-BERJAYA CONTESTS BUT IN THE OTHERS THREE AND SOMETIMES FOUR CANDIDATES HAVE BEEN NOMINATED. SINCE THE INDEPENDENTS ARE GENERALLY BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN PUT UP WITH SECRET ALLIANCE BACKING AND

PEKEMAS AND BERSATU ARE GIVEN LITTLE CHANCE, THE NON-ALLIANCE, NON-BERJAYA CONTENDERS WILL HAVE THEIR MAIN EFFECT ON THE LATTER PARTY. WHILE IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT WHILE THE ALLIANCE WITH VASTLY GREATER FINANCIAL RESOURCES HAS A TREMENDOUS ADVANTAGE, BERJAYA WILL STILL IMPROVE THE PERCENTAGE OF SEATS IT HOLDS IN THE ASSEMBLY. IN ORDER TO BLOCK AMENDMENTS TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION AND ENHANCE BARGAINING POWER BERJAYA WOULD LIKE TO TAKE 19 SEATS BUT IT DOES NOT SEEM LIKELY THAT IT WILL TAKE MORE THAN 12 OR 14 AND SOME PREDICT IT WILL TAKE ONLY 8 SEATS. AMONG ITS LEADERS, TUN FUAD HIMSELF IS THREATENED BY THE FACT HE WILL BE FACING BOTH A PEKEMAS AND AN ALLIANCE CANDIDATE WHILE DATUK HARRIS SALLEH, WHO LOST IN THE LABUAN BY-ELECTION LAST DECEMBER, SEEMS TO HAVE A BETTER CHANCE IN TENOM. ALL ALLIANCE LEADERS SEEM TO BE REASONABLY SECURE, PARTICULARLY TUN MUSTAPHA, ALTHOUGH SOME FEEL THAT MUSTAPHA/PROTEGE AND STATE FINANCE MINISTER DATUK DZULKIFLI HAMID COULD LOSE IN BONGAWAN.

6. COMMENT. CAMPAIGN/ORATORY HAS CLEARLY SHOWN THAT THE STRUGGLE IN SABAH REALLY IS BETWEEN THE TWO OLD RIVALS, MUSTAPHA AND FUAD, RATHER THAN BETWEEN OPPOSING POLITICAL VIEWS. PERSONALITIES ASIDE, BERJAYA CLAIMS CREDIT FOR LOOSENING MUSTAPHA'S IRON HOLD ON THE STATE AND FOR KEEPING SABAH IN MALAYSIA. THE ALLIANCE, FOR ITS PART, HAS SOUGHT TO TAR FUAD AND HIS ASSOCIATES WITH THE SAME BRUSH OF CORRUPTION AND RECEIVING FAVORS THAT THEY HAVE WIELDED ON MUSTAPHA. AS A RESULT OF HIS CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH MUSTAPHA IN RECENT YEARS, FUAD HAS HAD A HARD TIME ESTABLISHING HIMSELF AS A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE. THEREFORE, DATUK HUSSEIN IS BEING REALISTIC IN ASSUMING AN ATTITUDE OF NON-INVOLVEMENT WHILE STRENGTHENING KUALA LUMPUR'S REESTABLISHED HOLD ON THE POLICE POWER IN SABAH. MOST OBSERVERS FEEL THAT AT THIS JUNCTURE KUALA LUMPUR WOULD BE HAPPY WITH AN

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PAGE 03 KUALA 01966 02 OF 02 071005Z

ORDERLY ELECTION WHICH RETURNED THE ALLIANCE TO POWER AFTER WHICH THE FORCES FOR RECONCILIATION WOULD BE STRONG. IF FUAD LOSES IT WOULD BE EASIER TO BRING ABOUT THE SORT OF RECONCILIATION WHICH HAS JUST TAKEN PLACE IN SARAWAK BETWEEN THE RULING SUPP-PESAKA-BUMIPUTRA COALITION AND SNAP.

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